

Communication Matters

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Past issues of Communication Matters are posted on the **E-Learn Deaf & Hard of Hearing Resource Center**. Information or news related to Deaf or Hard of Hearing services may be forwarded to Julie Eckhardt at jewel@chartermi.net. Views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily the views of Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth, Rehabilitation Services.



Explore your Future Career Exploration at NTID

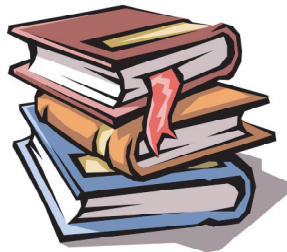
Deaf and Hard of Hearing High School students are invited to attend this career exploration program while experiencing life at NTID (National Technical Institute for the Deaf) in Rochester, New York. Students will have hands-on experience learning about careers, their interests and learning styles, while meeting other deaf and hard of hearing students.

For more information see:

www.ntid.rit.edu/prospective/eyf.php

Info to Use!

Guidelines for the Psychological and Vocational Assessment of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons



This document recommends and discusses guidelines for assessment, especially for vocational evaluation. The paper is in PDF format on **E-Learn, in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Center** under **Learning Resources**.

NETAC Networks

This newsletter provides technical assistance to professionals working with students who are deaf and hard of hearing in postsecondary settings. NETAC Networks is published by the Northeast Technical Assistance Center at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Contact: netac@rit.edu or the web at: netac.rit.edu

Best Practices: Interpreters



“The Agency shall provide interpreter services for clients who are deaf, hard of hearing, or who do not speak or understand English and require this service to participate in rehabilitation programming, except when it is the legal responsibility of another entity.” (MRS Policy 6325)

Choosing the right interpreter may make the difference between a successfully placed deaf worker and a frustrated client with many wasted counselor hours. Because communication is the basis of counseling relationships, job search, job training, and job retention, an appropriately qualified, professional interpreter is well worth the money. This article will clarify interpreter credentials and address related issues to help you and your client make an informed choice.

The procedure for Policy 6325 describes aspects to consider when hiring an interpreter:

“Since the background, education, language levels, and communication methods of clients who rely on manual communication or oral interpretation vary, the interpreter shall be carefully matched to the client’s communication mode. These modes include: ASL (American Sign Language), PSE (Pidgin Signed English) and SEE (Signed Exact English).”

Matching Interpreter and Client

To appropriately match interpreter and client requires that someone be familiar with the deaf person’s language level and with the skills of the interpreter. For this reason, interpreter referral agencies are invaluable. These agencies may be familiar with many of the deaf citizens in an area and should

have good understanding of interpreters' skills. Referral agencies also take into consideration the complexity of the subject matter when choosing interpreters. At times, the recommendation may be for an interpreter with a higher certification level at a higher cost. It is reasonable for the counselor to ask for clarification regarding the higher cost, as with any service provider. Meanwhile, it should be understood that all interpreters are not equal and that in most cases you get what you pay for. If clear and accurate communication is essential, then the interpreter with the best skills should be employed.

Whether or not your area has an interpreter referral agency (resources are listed at the end of this article), it is helpful to have a clear understanding of what the interpreter qualifications mean. Sign language interpreters in Michigan are either "certified" by a national association or "qualified" by the Michigan Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DODHH). These standards exist for the benefit of consumers, both hearing and deaf. Since MRS is mandated to be fiscally responsible, we will first consider those interpreters who have the lowest level of certification and are least expensive.

DODHH administers the Quality Assurance Screening Program to determine the skill level of persons who interpret, but who are not nationally certified. See the QA Levels listed at right.

Consider an interpreter who is determined by the DODHH screening to possess the skills of QA Level I. This person is able to interpret with a minimum of 60% accuracy. (If the client and interpreter are well known to each other, accuracy is likely to improve.) Imagine yourself in the place of a deaf person at a job interview. When the interviewer asks you a question, is 60% accuracy good enough? What about your answer? Would you feel confident that you are making the best impression if the interpreter can only guarantee 60% accuracy in relating your carefully thought out answer?

In situations where there is ample time for clarification, a less qualified interpreter may be suitable. In any high stakes situation, such as psychological testing, medical appointments, job interviews or classroom training, the interpreter

should have sufficient skills to meet the demand. In some of these situations, especially legal matters and psychological testing, a nationally certified interpreter (RID or NAD) should be arranged, even if this means paying for mileage and travel time.

It is natural to think that a less educated deaf person with seemingly poor language skills will require a less skilled interpreter. Actually, a

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Michigan's Interpreter Quality Assurance (QA) Levels

QA Level I Restricted Skill Level: Demonstrated ability to interpret/transliterate communication between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons with a minimum of 60% accuracy.

Recommended mainly for one-to-one situations where the interpreter has the opportunity to stop communication for clarification. Examples: Social/recreational situations, non-technical and informal meetings.

QA Level II Limited Skill Level:

Demonstrated ability to interpret/transliterate communication between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons with a minimum of 74% accuracy.

Recommended for one-to-one or small group situations where the interpreter may or may not have the opportunity to stop communication for clarification. Examples: Education/tutorial situations, informal meetings and daily living skills training.

QA Level III Intermediate Skill Level: Demonstrated ability to interpret/transliterate communication between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons with a minimum of 88% accuracy.

Recommended for situations where there may not be an opportunity for the interpreter to stop communication for clarification. Examples: education/tutorial situations, informal meetings and daily living skills, training, public meetings, interviews.

person with poor English language skills may be very fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). Because this language has an entirely different syntax and grammar than English, less fluent interpreters may struggle to understand ASL. Other deaf people may have very limited language skills even in ASL. These people will require a highly skilled interpreter who is able to make sense of gesture and non-standard signs.

What about family and friends who volunteer?

Many deaf people have a friend or family member who they depend on to assist with communication. It is tempting for counselors, who already have enough to do, to rely on these handy and free interpreters. The MRS Interpreter Services policy discourages this practice:

“Using interpreters who are not personally related to the client whenever possible, such as family members, close friends, or job associates, will help ensure a more impartial, professional and confidential interpretation.” (#6325)

There are several important reasons to avoid family or friends as interpreters:

- Professional interpreters are trained to provide a non-biased interpretation. Family members and well-meaning friends have a natural investment in the progress of the deaf person. This good intention may influence the way information is relayed. In addition, information acquired while signing may influence future relations between the client and the signer.
- Professional interpreters adhere to a strict code of confidentiality. Relatives and friends may not maintain confidentiality and other ethical standards. Fearing disclosure to the wider community, a deaf person may refrain from sharing important information with the counselor.
- Encouraging a deaf person, especially a youth or young adult, to use professional interpreters fosters independence and confidence. Parents often

offer to interpret for their son or daughter. This may inhibit rapport building between the counselor and the client for the reasons listed above. At the same time, the parent’s intervention may limit the young person’s growth as an adult able to communicate independently and professionally.

What about Informed Choice?

If a deaf person requests a particular interpreter, that preference should be honored whenever it is reasonable to do so. However, if the deaf person requests a family member, friend, or other non-certified signer, it is the counselor’s responsibility to explain the possible consequences of this choice (lack of confidentiality, accuracy, or professional objectivity). If the setting to be interpreted warrants a more highly skilled interpreter, the counselor should explain the reasons to the client.

Resources:

2004 Interpreter and TTY Service Directories published by DODHH:
www.mcde-dodhh.org

RID Certification Levels: www.michdhh.org/interpreters/rid_certifications.html

NAD Certification levels: www.michdhh.org/interpreters/nad_certifications.html

Michigan Interpreter Referral Agencies: www.michdhh.org/interpreters/more_information.html

Communicating with Ease: Interpreters and People who are Deaf on E-Learn: elearn.mrs.state.mi.us/knowit/otherprograms/dhoh/communicate.taf

Communication Matters is now available at
www.michigan.gov/mrs
under Disability Resources.